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9 July 2013

Mr James Keulemans
Our Lady's RC High School
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Dear Mr Keulemans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Our Lady's RC High School

Following my visit to your school on 8 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, teachers and a member of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and took the opportunity to tour the school, look at students' work and read minutes of Governing Body meetings. The school action plan was evaluated.

Context

There have been a number of staff changes, particularly in the mathematics department, since the last inspection. Some of these changes are a result of internal appointments while others involve staff new to the school. This change has the potential to slow down progress towards being a good school. It is important that this group of new staff, including those with new responsibilities, are given appropriate induction and support.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, improving students' achievement in mathematics has been a main priority. You are clear that bolstering teaching will have the greatest impact on quickening students' progress. Following the last inspection you have taken decisive steps to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics and also improve leadership of the department. A mixture of internal promotions which build on strengths, such as the use of progress data to inform teachers' planning, along with new appointments, adds potency to the team.

An increased focus on students' progress is now evident in mathematics. This is because a new scheme of work has been introduced and the tracking system refreshed. Teachers in mathematics can now spot where they need to provide either more support or more challenge to ensure students fulfil their potential.

You are determined to secure improvements in teaching and leadership, which are sustainable, long lasting and happen throughout the whole school. Your school is already reaping the benefit of having identified teachers' strengths and building on these to provide impetus to the improvements that are taking place. Teachers say that the schools' coaching programme has not only started to hone their teaching skills but is also giving them experience in preparation for future leadership responsibility.

Students are beginning to notice improvements. They say that both behaviour and teaching have improved and they feel that they are making better progress because teachers help them with their work. Students were clear that when additional adults are in the class, teachers are able to give them even more individual help and as a result they learn more. The students spoken to were also proud to see their work displayed in classrooms and on corridor walls, they said that this motivates them to work harder.

The Governing Body is ensuring that planned improvements throughout the school are both achieved and then maintained. It has already taken steps to commission an external audit of its governance and the Chair of Governors has taken specific responsibility for overseeing improvements in mathematics. These actions provide the governors with a valuable opportunity to match their skills more closely to the needs of the school and to hold the headteacher to account for any lack of progress.

An action plan has been developed by you and other leaders. While the plan is succinct and gives an accurate picture of the actions required for improvement, it does not give easily measurable outcomes which can be used by other staff or governors to measure success. By clearly distinguishing actions to be taken from how these will impact on students' progress in terms of attainment, behaviour and/or attendance, you will strengthen your drive to become a good school.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Make the action plan and any specific area plans more focussed on student outcomes as a means of ensuring that the impact on student progress can be measured accurately.
- Secure the impact of the new scheme of work for mathematics by ensuring that support for new appointees is well planned and effective.
- Make use of the planned external review of governance to ensure that the Governing Body is effective in securing good progress by all students in all subjects.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You are making good use of a range of external support. Links with the local authority are strong and there are plans to extend your involvement in school improvement events. The local authority is in the process of brokering for a specialist teacher in mathematics through the National College for Teaching and Leadership as a means of supporting colleagues in the mathematics department. Other external support, used in varying degrees, includes attendance at Ofsted improvement seminars, involvement with the North Manchester Partnership, Manchester Catholic Education Partnership and the Manchester Schools Alliance. You are also in the process of re-establishing a previous link with an outstanding school in another local authority. You feel that initial contacts with this external support, have been positive in providing you, other leaders and some teachers with ideas and inspiration. You will need to effectively manage this vast array of contacts and ensure that you are not distracted from your main focus of improving outcomes for students.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester and as below.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector